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ABSTRACT

The basic requirements of all good prose are clarity, accuracy, brevity, and simplicity. Especially in public prose--in which the meaning is the crux of the article or speech--concise, vigorous English demands a minimum of adjectives, a maximum use of the active voice, nouns carefully chosen, a logical argument with no labored or obscure points, and no florid rhetoric. Too often, educated students criticize the sensationalism of newspapers while they themselves show a propensity for writing obscurely and pretentiously. Many writers, however, such as Bertrand Russell and Winston Churchill demonstrate that complex ideas can be communicated effectively in simple English with no ostentation. Although mass culture and mass education have become ruthless levellers of prose quality in public communication, teachers should foster each individual's ability to write competently on a complex subject while discouraging the influence of passing literary fashions. [Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of original document.] (JM)

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Good and Bad Public Prose

By Stewart Cockburn
Journalist

It must at least be a novelty for English teachers to be lectured by someone who had the misfortune to leave school at 16 with a prejudice against Shakespeare, who is largely unfamiliar with current English literature, who is not a literary person in any professionally accepted sense of the term, and who is not yet convinced that the world would be saved if only the damned newspapers would employ journalists with decent Arts degrees!

To add to this list of heresies let me confess that I have always possessed a child-like faith that good English follows reasonably clear thinking, not simply a set of rules called grammar, which youth loathes and maturity forgets. Today, even if my life depended on it, I could not define for you a gerund, a participle, or the meaning of the subjunctive mood. Like the first and second stages of a space vehicle, these definitions — and many more — have long ago fallen away somewhere into the commodious void of my mind.

Nevertheless, I have managed to earn my living for 30 years by writing, and therefore I do have opinions, right or wrong, about what is or is not good public prose. This covers, of course, an enormous field. It is the stuff of politics, journalism, advertising, government . . . the list is endless. Yet the basic requirement of all good writing — writing which can be understood by most ordinary people — is surely that it be simple and free of ambiguity. Somebody once complained to J. B. Priestley that his writing seemed too simple. He very properly replied: "But I've spent years and years trying to **make my writing simple.** What you see as a fault, I regard as a virtue."

To me, and here I quite deliberately throw down the gauntlet, the intellectual in literature is much too often a snob. Too often, he seems to equate dullness, obscurity and circumlocution with quality. Alternatively, he loves to show off, and tends to become intoxicated with verbosity. Either way, he does not seem to want to share anything with the crowd, which perhaps he secretly despises. So he decries popular journalism, advertising and any other media which aim to communicate efficiently to any large audience, and which succeed in doing so.

If the message of the medium is spurious or if, as McLuhan tells us, the medium is the message (or the massage), then complaint may be justified. The objection should then be to the subject matter, not the form of words. But let not the Doctor of Letters look too disparagingly at public language which, though it may contain the occasional cliche and may trouble the pedant, is alive, and kicking and idiomatic and crystal clear in meaning. For in public prose, meaning is surely the crux of the matter. Henry Schoenheimer, himself a gifted communicator, sneers at anyone who is concerned only with "the mechanics of communication". Yet what is the use of a 15-year-old studying an elegant, felicitously-expressed, high-flown criticism of Shakespeare which is largely incomprehensible to him; and if, therefore, it produces in him only feelings of frustration, inferiority or despair? My experience is that young people of quite ordinary intelligence can be helped to write clearly and accurately, though not necessarily with great style; and I feel that the standard of public prose would be higher if teachers could devote

even more time than they do now to equipping their pupils with the tools of basic English, i.e. good, utility English, and a little less time to the more tempting, though doubtless more challenging, task of trying to make silken literary purses out of sows' ears.

Now, the press is a favourite Aunt Sally of English teachers who discuss public prose with their pupils. It is true that newspapers, produced under enormous pressures of time and space, are not always models of literary excellence. On the other hand, the teachers who criticize the press because, they say, it is concerned only with the vulgar and the sensational, and does not reflect the many good things in our environment, often make the same error — of over-stressing the bad and ignoring the good. Let me take one example — the local morning paper. How frequently does the critic pause in the full flight of his abuse and consider what is good in it? For many years, nearly all the leaders and other commentaries on foreign affairs in "The Advertiser" come from the pen of Noel Adams, one of the most graceful and perceptive writers in Australian journalism.

More than any other journalist I know in this country, with the possible exception of Douglas Wilkie, Adams has long exemplified my argument that it is possible to write about a complex subject in language so limpidly pure that any average secondary school child can follow his meaning. Mary Armitage, Desmond Colquhoun, Shirley Despoja, Pat Rappolt, Max Fatchen, John Miles, young Bruce Guerin and quite a few others, not all with a familiar by-line, are highly competent exponents of public prose. Few of them offend against the best canons of the Queen's English and some have achieved considerable literary distinction.

Possibly I have become unduly sensitive to the faults of newspapers and to the unerring exposure of these by cliche watchers, and other critics. In a defensive (?) spirit, for example, I went over to the new National Library in Canberra the other day to glance through some records of seminars conducted by the Victorian Association for the Teaching of English. I wanted to see what English teachers usually talk about on occasions like this. (I also thought, if I intended to be provocative, as I do, that it might be more tactful to seek my material from Victoria).

I found one teacher complaining, and I quote: "The inability of modern pupils to construct a complex sentence, which they replace by a conglomeration of simple sentences and phrases hooked together by commas, is due, at least in part, to their failure to comprehend the whole of a thought at once and so establish, without conscious analysis, its major and minor aspects which, instead, appear as equivalent and consecutive elements". I have heard a lot about newspaper jargon, but you know, to me, that sentence comes very close to being windy fustian, as well as remarkably clumsy English.

Another teacher complained, and again I quote, that "criticisms of Holbrook have tended to centre around . . . I repeat that . . . centre around . . . Holbrook's neo-Laurentian harangues and his psychologizings about his pupils". Holbrook, we are told, "anathematizes the prevalent schizoid weakness of the whole sensibility of our time" and "has swallowed the myth of the Golden Age in its naivest form".

Is it necessary for me to suggest that that sort of stuff would certainly not be good public prose? Nor does it seem to me good English, and I can't help doubting whether anyone who habitually talks and writes like that is likely to be a good teacher of English or anything else.

The point I wish to make by these examples — and I assure you that I found almost as many as you would in a daily newspaper — is that we all live in glass houses: teachers, journalists, politicians, public servants and advertising agents alike. Some pieces of glass are doubtless thicker than others. Yet surely the lesson of the gobbledygook I have just quoted is that when a writer, a journalist, a teacher or anyone else tries to be too clever . . . too esoteric . . . he is apt to come to grief and to make a fool of himself.

I think you will agree with me when I say that we usually tend to come to grief in the use of the English language if we haven't first thought out clearly what we wish to say, or if what we say isn't worth saying, anyway. I hope you will also agree that the kind of simplicity in speech and writing which I advocate is not as easy to achieve as it sounds.

To me, however, the serious thing about standards of public prose is that it is so often the more highly educated people who speak and write obscurely and pretentiously. Research in 1964 by Professor T. G. Hunter, of the University of Sydney, showed, for example, that a significant proportion of Australia's best students were illiterate. No wonder there are so many examples of poor English in newspapers by academic "guest" writers. A political scientist with a Ph.D. used the word "preposterosity" in an article in "The Canberra Times" a couple of weeks ago. A National University statement issued the same day contained the word "simultaneity" — yes, I know it's in the Concise Oxford Dictionary, but it still makes me shudder.

An economist delivered this sentence in an article in the "Financial Review: "The core of this extra-mural, unofficial money market is the inter-company lending market, the growth of which has precluded the banking system from the benefits of intermediating a flow of loanable funds at times touching $1,000m." A journalist who wrote like that should be sacked. In contrast, the Financial Review's Tariff expert, Alan Wood, and its political correspondent, Maximilian Walsh, write with splendid clarity and force about extremly difficult subjects.

Here is a quotation from the speech by the Prime Minister, Mr. Gorton, in the House of Representatives last year on the occasion of the death of his predecessor. It is a speech that he had several weeks' notice to prepare:—

"I take their minds back", said Mr. Gorton, "to the calumny which then was visited upon the head of the late Prime Minister, Treasurer as he then was, and take their minds back to the fact that, although what was done was a Government decision and not a personal decision and what resulted was a Government responsibility, never once did the late Prime Minister, upon whom this was visited, seek to evade, to excuse or to remove himself from that area of controversy". Mr. Gorton holds the degree of Master of Arts from the University of Oxford.

Some years ago, the present Governor-General, Sir Paul Hasluck, who is also a Master of Arts, complained in a Syme Oration about the decay of language. He said he was often misreported in newspapers, and declared: "We suffer from the inability of people to read or write with exactness". A few months later, at an ANZAAS conference in Adelaide, the then Mr. Hasluck delivered a paper on "The Future of the Aborigine". Asked by a newspaper reporter for a summary of it in advance, he turned the reporter away with the statement that his lecture was "designed for intelligent people only". There is a record of this

remark in the newspapers of the day. I would like to quote you one sentence from the Hasluck paper:

"I mention this," said the lecturer, "because it is necessary that we should make up our minds whether we are discussing the future of the aborigines as aborigines, thinking only of that minority which can still be regarded as aborigines in the narrow sense or whether, when we mention the 'future of the aborigines', we are really asking ourselves, firstly, what is going to happen to the big majority of these people who are ceasing to be aborigines and, secondly, will their numbers be increased by a continuation of the change among those who at the present moment can be properly defined as aborigines".

Perhaps this example of obscure and involved English by a scholar and an historian throws some light on the reason why public men are sometimes misreported. It certainly makes strange reading beside the author's complaint about the decay of language.

Then there is our old friend Max Harris, one-time winner of a Tennyson Medal, who can indeed, when he wishes, write with distinction, but who has never been able to cure himself of the disease which the late Alan Herbert called "dolichological longiverbosity" . . . the over-use of long words. I came across a typical Harris neologism in "The Australian" three weeks ago: "In more recent years," he wrote in his column 'Browsing', "there's been a constant arboriferation of journals . . . " — whatever that may mean!

It reminds me of what Roget said, somewhat turgidly, I'm afraid, when he protested in his famous Thesaurus against "some modern writers who have indulged in a habit of arbitrarily fabricating new words and a new-fangled phraseology, without any necessity, and with manifest injury to the purity of the language." He called this "a vicious practice, the offspring of indolence or conceit, which implies an ignorance or neglect of the riches in which the English language abounds . . . "

What is it that so many public men and women, and so many serious students of the English language, find to admire in long, clumsy words and sentences as opposed to short, clear words and sentences? To me, the whole great battle for better public prose turns on this simple issue of brevity and clarity — in thought, in speech, in writing. Why is it so difficult to achieve?

The translators of the authorised version of the English Bible achieved it; but of course no one reads the Bible nowadays. Winston Churchill achieved it — and I suppose he's old hat, too. Do you remember his famous rallying speech in 1940 just after Dunkirk: "We shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end . . . " etc? Eighty-one electrifying words. Six sentences. And no fewer than 70 words of one syllable.

I'm sorry to return yet again to my attack on Max Harris. But since he and I are notorious coat trailers, I'm sure he'll forgive me . . . or will he? . . . when I say that the pitfalls which await the intellectually pretentious were never better illustrated than by the celebrated Ern Malley hoax of 1944. For those of you who are too young to remember it, Max was then publishing a literary journal called "Angry Penguins". It was an enterprising thing to do, it was well produced by young men widely acknowledged to be brilliant, and I still have at home the memorable Ern Malley issue with its front cover illustrated by a painting from the brush of a then virtually unknown artist named Sidney Nolan.

Two other young poets of the day, James McAuley and Harold Stewart, thought that much of the poetry in Angry Penguins was windy gibberish. So, with the aid of a Concise Oxford Dictionary, a volume of Shakespeare, a dictionary of quotations and an American sanitary journal, they devised 16 poems one Saturday afternoon. They opened their reference books at random, chose words or phrases haphazardly, made lists of these and wove them into nonsensical sentences. They misquoted. They made false allusions. They deliberately perpetrated bad verse and selected awkward rhymes from Ripman's rhyming dictionary.

They sent the result to Max Harris and his co-editor, John Reed. In a letter purporting to be written by a young lady named Ethel Malley, they explained that the 16 poems were the life's work of her brother Ern, an obscure garage mechanic in Sydney, who had died at 25 from Grave's Disease. "Ethel Malley" sought an opinion from Harris on the merits of the poems.

If I may be permitted a relaxing excursion into Harris-type vernacular for a moment, good old Maxey fell for it. He hailed Malley as a genius and published all the poems in a special commemorative issue of Angry Penguins.

I haven't the time to review the whole glorious hoax, or quote some of Max's earnest and highfalutin analysis of the poetry, but I do want to quote part of what McAuley, now, of course, Professor of English at the University of Tasmania, and Stewart, wrote about the affair, which rang round the literary world. What they said then applies today with equal force to all forms of public prose, as well as to published verse and literary criticism.

"For some years now," they wrote, "we have observed with distaste the gradual decay of meaning and craftsmanship in poetry. It seemed to us that a distinctive feature of the Angry Penguin group of writers was that the literary fashion they sponsored rendered its devotees insensible of absurdity and incapable of ordinary discrimination.

"Our feeling was that by processes of critical self-delusion and mutual admiration, the perpetrators of this humourless nonsense had managed to pass it off on would-be intellectuals and Bohemians here and abroad as great poetry.

"Their work appeared to us to be a collection of garish images without coherent meaning and struture, as if one erected a coat of bright paint and called it a house."

Summing up, they added these words: "The success of the hoax proves that a literary fashion can become so hypnotically powerful that it can suspend the operation of critical intelligence in quite a large number of people."

Now I shouldn't spend more time on this. But the whole Ern Malley affair is worth researching by every English teacher who isn't already thoroughly familiar with it, and I suspect that few of you under 45 will know much about it.

My submission to you, then, is that as teachers, you have a heavy responsibility not to allow the average student to become too bemused by passing literary fashions — "the stream of consciousness cult", for example, which may prejudice his ability to think and write clearly and accurately, whether he is destined to become a company director or a clerk, an architect or a politician, a journalist or a teacher.

Now let me turn to the field of politics, in which I am at present working in Canberra. Whatever you may think, there is no doubt in my mind that the **general** standard of speaking, speech writing and public reporting and documentation in Australian public life has been transformed for the better during the past generation. Let it be acknowledged that teachers of English and people like Sir Ernest Gowers can probably take much credit for this.

Politicians are better educated, and this should have meant a corresponding rise in the quality of their speeches. You may be surprised to learn that 50 of the 184 Members and Senators in today's Federal Parliament have university degrees. That is a ratio of better than one in four, far above the community average. However, paradoxically, it has not affected parliamentary debating as we might have expected.

According to Hansard men I have talked with in Canberra, although the **average** standard of speech-making has risen significantly, **excellence** is more rare. The great orator, the great word spinner, is harder to find and hear. Mass culture, in other words, and mass education, have become ruthless levellers in political and in other spheres. I have reported and observed Parliament from the press gallery for 30 years, and the improvement in the standard of speaking on the Labor side is particularly striking. Yet there are fewer parliamentarians educated in the old classical tradition, deeply schooled in Latin and Greek, and learned in all the humanities, men whose felicity of language and grace of style could sometimes move you deeply. In reporting this to you, I realize that I am undercutting to some extent the validity of my own argument that it is better to teach young people to communicate efficiently on the plains, rather than to assault the literary alps. Well, so be it. You must decide for yourselves which course is right.

I can only tell you that in my opinion the business of the nation is conducted more competently, and the welfare of the majority advanced, because there are more literate, if not literary, politicians. Many years ago, some parliamentary speeches were almost impossible to understand. Once, for example, in the South Australian Parliament, a Member was unwise enough to complain publicly because, he said, he was persistently misreported. On the next occasion that he rose in the Assembly to speak, the morning paper arranged to report him verbatim and published the result. Here is part of it — you will still find it in the files of the Public Library:

"Mr. Speaker,

The reporters er ought not to — I repeat, ought not to be the ones to judge of what is important er not to say what should be left out er but a Member can only judge what is important. As I er as my er speeches as reported er as to what I say is reported sometimes no one er nobody can tell er no one can understand from reports er what it is er what I mean, and er what a Member thinks of importance is sometimes left out er omitted. The reporters er the papers er points are reported er I mean what a paper thinks of interest er is reported. I can't compliment reporters."

It goes on in that strain for quite a while.

I can still remember some of the old timers in Canberra who delivered themselves of some pretty weird language. The greatest mixed metaphor of all times probably came from the lips of the late Mr. Lazzarini, Minister for the Interior in the Curtin Government.

"Mr. Speaker," he said once, "the Honourable Member who has just spoken seems to me to be sitting on the fence with both ears to the ground trying hard to drag a red herring across the trail."

More recently, another Member almost literally brought the House down when he said: "The Right Honourable Member for Melbourne (it was Mr. Calwell) is playing a dangerous game. You could say he is like a man skating along a barbed wire fence with one leg on each side."

I can't help wondering if there is some Freudian significance in this parliamentary preoccupation with fences.

The most intractable problem for the reformers of language in public life is still, however, the parliamentary draftsman. Listen to this extract from the Sewerage Rates Ordinance, 1968, as contained in Australian Capital Territory Ordinance No. 30 of 1968, Clause 11, Section 2:

"In the last preceding sub-section—

(a) A reference to the erection of an additional building on land shall be read as a reference to the erection of a building on land on which a building contained a flushed sanitary fixture is erected immediately before the erection of that building; and

(b) A reference to the erection of a building, other than an additional building on land on which either no building is erected or no building containing a flushed sanitary fixture is erected immediately before the erection of the building."

It reminds me a little of Sir Paul Hasluck and the aborigines.

You will forgive me if I still regard that now unheeded figure of a past age, Sir Robert Menzies, as the finest speaker of my generation in Australian politics. Sir Warwick Fairfax, one of Menzies' bitterest critics, nevertheless was candid enough to sum him up in these words:

"How exactly is Menzies brilliant? Firstly, in his mastery of that English language which stands unrivalled, except by ancient Greek, as a perfect and flexible expression of human thought and feeling. In recent Australian history he, almost alone, reminds one of the golden age of English politics, when a great statesman was almost always an orator."

As a matter of interest, Menzies' equipment for his role as a master of the spoken language included the memorization during his student days of something like 30,000 lines of Shakespeare.

I think it was Schoenheimer who asserted recently that the only virtue in a child learning Shakespeare by heart is that he is mechanically memorizing. Am I being rather stupid if I say that to me, on the contrary, it seems common sense to suppose that much music of great poets murmuring in the mind is more likely to help than to hinder a boy or girl in his efforts to write good English? I could wish that I had committed more verse to **memory** at school and struggled less with long-winded **criticisms** of that verse. It is certainly hard to believe that his memorization of so much Shakespeare did **not** assist the development of the former **Prime Minister's** powers of speech.

In the House, or on a platform, Menzies usually preferred to speak from notes. By contrast, when he had to prepare any major policy speech or statement in writing, he rarely dictated to a secretary. Instead, you would go into his office and find him writing carefully in a neat script, usually with a pencil. The entire first draft would be completed by

hand. He argued, and he still argues, that dictation tends to produce sloppy and diffuse prose.

Practising what he preaches, he wrote every word of his hundred-thousand word volume of memoirs: "Afternoon Light" by hand. The same was true of his series of lectures at the University of Virginia a couple of years ago, since published under the title: "Central Power in the Australian Commonwealth". I remember that an Adelaide columnist once criticized the word-wasting of politicians. Coincidentally, the Prime Minister had just completed a tightly-written policy statement of 1,000 words. I sent the statement to the columnist in question and challenged him to find one superfluous word in it. He found three. That, therefore, is my idea of good public prose — clear, straightforward English, with a minimum of adjectives, a maximum use of the active voice, the nouns carefully chosen, the argument logical, with no point laboured or obscure, and no mere posturing or florid rhetoric.

The late Dr. Evatt, a Doctor of Letters, probably failed to become Prime Minister because, despite his notable literary credentials, he was a dreary speaker and writer of material designed for a mass audience. There were **other** reasons, but I am sure this was a major one.

Mind you, although there was only one Menzies, there is occasionally still some magnificently lusty English to be heard amid the otherwise dry stuff of everyday debate in Canberra.

I know of none better than that used by Clyde Cameron, the Labor Member for Hindmarsh, to describe the irrepressible Andrew Jones:

"This jackdaw in peacock's feathers who comes here in the guise of a Member of Parliament . . . a top-off . . . a pimp . . . a dobber . . . a common informer . . . this charlatan . . . this lump of affectation . . . this blatherskite, this blusterer, this blowhard . . ."

I hope you may agree with me that not even Burton, in his Anatomy of Melancholy, did much better than that. So Parliament cannot yet be dismissed as entirely dead — killed by the mealy-mouthed, anti-intellectual communicators.

May I go back for a last look at what is or is not good English prose? I am well aware that many of you could never feel satisfied merely to teach courses in "English expression". Professor L. F. Neal, a formidable master of prose, told you at one of your own conferences in 1960:

"A conception of language exclusively concerned with its communicative function, as though this could in fact be separated and isolated from its other services, is a defective one."

Professor Neal would object to the limited objectives for which I have argued this afternoon. Yet I must challenge his use of the word: 'defective'. ("A conception of language exclusively concerned with its communicative function . . . is a defective one."). Let him substitute **'limited' for 'defective'.** I cannot concede that a simple, straightforward style consisting mainly of short, common words and uncomplicated sentence structures is necessarily **defective** English. Indeed, I am tempted to believe that what I earlier called attempts to make silken literary purses out of sows' ears — i.e. vain efforts to turn us all into poets and literary creatures, are responsible for some of the confusion and clumsiness which mark the language of that vast majority of us who need merely to communicate efficiently but who lack the sensitivity, the insights and other gifts to do more than this.

I have a copy of Professor Neal's address to you on the subject of "Language in Education" and I have read it most carefully. To me, he is a man with a penetrating mind and a rare power and range of language. Yet I am bound to say to you that I would never rate him highly as an exponent of **good public prose.** As exemplified by his paper to you, his language is too difficult. If he wrote like that for a newspaper, or spoke like that on a street corner, I don't think many ordinary people would stick with him for more than two or three minutes.

I can best illustrate what I mean by quoting to you two passages, one from Neal, and one from Professor Sir Keith Hancock. Both quotations are taken from addresses given in public on general subjects to educated audiences.

Here, first, is Neal:

"A concentration on the purely communicative function of language is a like deficiency. It neglects the larger and more essentially humane nature of language. Truth of expression, as I understand it, would include the power of language to educate the sensitive imagination — and this, as I have already said, involves a precision and a clarity of an ampler kind.

"There is in a good poem or in a well-constructed paragraph a clarity, a precision, a rigour of intellect every bit as exacting as the scientist's or philosopher's, but of a wider and more fully human scope. It is with this that language in education should above all be concerned."

Now let me quote from Hancock, who was delivering a paper on "War in this Century":

"I propose," he began, "to inquire what sense there is, if any, in studying past wars. Let me begin by quoting a catch phrase: 'Preparing For The Last War'.

"This familiar gibe is aimed at the politicians and the brass hats; but it might just as well be aimed at the historians, who encourage people to peer into the past (so it is said) instead of looking forward to the future. The gibe assumes that no substantial bridge exists between past, present and future; that history never repeats itself; that human experience is chancy and unpredictable. And so it often is.

"Whoever could have predicted that Hitler would be gassed during the first World War, but not gassed badly enough to spoil his voice? Whoever could have predicted the ruin which that voice would inflict upon Germany and the whole world?"

Well, there it is. The first man, I submit, will communicate efficiently only with highly literate people. The other, though handling an equally difficult and theoretical subject, speaks as if by instinct in language which will hold the attention of an average mother's club as closely as that of a roomful of philosophers.

I think the two quotations are fairly matched and I would be interested to listen to your own analysis of the reasons why, although both are comparably fine examples of the use of English, the one is so much better public prose than the other.

The popular writings of Bertrand Russell are my own favourite example of the argument that persons of the greatest intellect can communicate effectively with the man in the street when they use simple, down-to-earth English and resist the temptation to shine, or to show off.

May I conclude by giving you my own list of seven deadly sins to be avoided by anyone who aspires to write good public prose? They are:

- Pedantry.
- Dullness.
- Obscurity.
- Pretentiousness.
- Being Too Clever By Half.
- Verbosity.
- Obsession with some sort of literary cult.

May I also quote a paragraph from 'The Elements of Style', by William Strunk Junior and E. B. White:

"Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all his sentences short, or that he avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that every word tell."

Public prose would, I am sure, be much better if every public man and every academic were to read that marvellous little primer of 70 pages every night before going to bed.

The only other defence I wish to offer for my cult of brevity is that although I seem to have been talking for an unconscionably long time, I have nevertheless finished my paper within the time mentioned to me by your secretary as being "par for the course".

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